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SUBJECT: IRAQ STUDY GROUP REPORT GUIDANCE

REF: STATE 195169 (NOTAL)

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¶1. This cable provides initial guidance for posts to use in responding to inquiries about the report of the Iraq Study Group, led by former Secretary of State James A. Baker III and former Representative Lee Hamilton.

¶2. BACKGROUND: The Iraq Study Group (ISG) was created on March 15, 2006 at the request of a bipartisan group of members of Congress. The facilitating agency for the group is the U.S. Institute of Peace ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)) with the support of the Center for the Study of the Presidency ([www.thepresidency.org](http://www.thepresidency.org)), the Center for Strategic and International Studies ([www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)), and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University ([www.bakerinstitute.org](http://www.bakerinstitute.org)). More background information is available on its USIP website. The ISG first briefed its report to President Bush, then members of Congress, and then posted the 140-plus page report to the websites of

its four supporting organizations. USIP invited Ambassadors from Coalition members, NATO allies, plus Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to a briefing and reception with Baker and Hamilton at 5:00 pm EST on December 6. Reftel provides information on a recent briefing that senior Department and CENTCOM officials provided to Washington's diplomatic corps on the review processes underway and the current situation in Iraq, and may be used to complement information provided here. The President's comments can be found at [www.whitehouse.gov/news](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news).

¶3. The Administration is not bound by the recommendations of the commission, although it is considering them seriously in the context of a wider USG policy review. END BACKGROUND

¶4. Posts may draw on the following points in explaining this non-governmental report to host governments:

-- The Iraq Study Group (ISG) led by former Secretary of State James A. Baker III and former Representative Lee Hamilton is a Congressionally appointed non-governmental group.

-- The ISG's findings and recommendations will be reviewed by the Administration and considered as important input into the administration's Iraq policy review.

-- Our goal is a careful, deliberate consideration of all aspects of our strategy in order to chart a successful way forward.

-- The Administration will discuss a new way ahead in Iraq. While there are certain recommendations that we

might not ultimately support, there is much good in the report.

-- After briefing President Bush and members of Congress, the ISG posted its findings on December 6 on the websites

of its four supporting organizations at 11 am EST on December 6, 2006 (see background for organizations and URLs).

-- The President himself said on December 4th: "My attitude is, I ought to absorb and listen to everything that's being said because I'm not satisfied with the progress being made in Iraq. And the good news is, neither is the Iraqi leadership. And so I'm listening to the Iraqis. I'm going to listen to members of Congress. I want to listen to, obviously, Baker-Hamilton. More importantly, when it comes to military matters, I want to listen to the military to come up with a way of achieving our objective quicker."

-- Upon the report's release on Dec 6th the President noted: "I told the ISG members that this report, called "The Way Forward," will be taken very seriously by the administration. This report gives a very tough assessment of the situation in Iraq. It is a report that brings some really very interesting proposals. And we will take every proposal seriously and we will act in a timely fashion. The commission is headed up to Congress, and I urge the members of Congress to take this report seriously. While they won't agree with every proposal, and we probably won't agree with every proposal, it

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nevertheless is an opportunity to come together and work together on this important issue."

-- We look forward to continuing a dialogue with addressee host countries as the review process proceeds, and to consultations on how we can together further the international community's common goals in Iraq.

15. For reference, the executive summary of this non-governmental report is as follows:

BEGIN TEXT

#### Executive Summary

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating. There is no path that can guarantee success, but the prospects can be improved.

In this report, we make a number of recommendations for actions to be taken in Iraq, the United States, and the region. Our most important recommendations call for new and enhanced diplomatic and political efforts in Iraq and the region, and a change in the primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq that will enable the United States to begin to move its combat forces out of Iraq responsibly. We believe that these two recommendations are equally important and reinforce one another. If they are effectively implemented, and if the Iraqi government moves forward with national reconciliation, Iraqis will have an opportunity for a better future, terrorism will be dealt a blow, stability will be enhanced in an important part of the world, and America's credibility, interests, and values will be protected.

The challenges in Iraq are complex. Violence is increasing in scope and lethality. It is fed by a Sunni Arab insurgency, Shiite militias and death squads, al Qaeda, and widespread criminality. Sectarian conflict is the principal challenge to stability. The Iraqi people have a democratically elected government, yet it is not adequately advancing national reconciliation, providing

basic security, or delivering essential services. Pessimism is pervasive.

If the situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences could be severe. A slide toward chaos could trigger the collapse of Iraq's government and a humanitarian catastrophe. Neighboring countries could intervene. Sunni-Shia clashes could spread. Al Qaeda could win a propaganda victory and expand its base of operations. The global standing of the United States could be diminished. Americans could become more polarized.

During the past nine months we have considered a full range of approaches for moving forward. All have flaws. Our recommended course has shortcomings, but we firmly believe that it includes the best strategies and tactics to positively influence the outcome in Iraq and the region.

#### External Approach

The policies and actions of Iraq's neighbors greatly affect its stability and prosperity. No country in the region will benefit in the long term from a chaotic Iraq. Yet Iraq's neighbors are not doing enough to help Iraq achieve stability. Some are undercutting stability.

The United States should immediately launch a new diplomatic offensive to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region. This diplomatic effort should include every country that has an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including all of Iraq's neighbors. Iraq's neighbors and key states in and outside the region should form a support group to reinforce security and national reconciliation within Iraq, neither of which Iraq can achieve on its own.

Given the ability of Iran and Syria to influence events within Iraq and their interest in avoiding chaos in Iraq, the United States should try to engage them constructively. In seeking to influence the behavior of both countries, the United States has disincentives and incentives available. Iran should stem the flow of arms and training to Iraq, respect Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and use its influence over Iraqi Shia groups to encourage national reconciliation. The issue of Iran's nuclear programs should continue to be dealt with by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany. Syria should

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control its border with Iraq to stem the flow of funding, insurgents, and terrorists in and out of Iraq.

The United States cannot achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability. There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts: Lebanon, Syria, and President Bush's June 2002 commitment to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. This commitment must include direct talks with, by, and between Israel, Lebanon, Palestinians (those who accept Israel's right to exist), and Syria.

As the United States develops its approach toward Iraq and the Middle East, the United States should provide additional political, economic, and military support for Afghanistan, including resources that might become available as combat forces are moved out of Iraq.

#### Internal Approach

The most important questions about Iraq's future are now the responsibility of Iraqis. The United States must

adjust its role in Iraq to encourage the Iraqi people to take control of their own destiny.

The Iraqi government should accelerate assuming responsibility for Iraqi security by increasing the number and quality of Iraqi Army brigades. While this process is under way, and to facilitate it, the United States should significantly increase the number of U.S. military personnel, including combat troops, imbedded (sic) in and supporting Iraqi Army units. As these actions proceed, U.S. combat forces could begin to move out of Iraq.

The primary mission of U.S. forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations. By the first quarter of 2008, subject to unexpected developments in the security situation on the ground, all combat brigades not necessary for force protection could be out of Iraq. At that time, U.S. combat forces in Iraq

could be deployed only in units embedded with Iraqi forces, in rapid-reaction and special operations teams, and in training, equipping, advising force protection, and search and rescue. Intelligence and support efforts would continue. A vital mission of those rapid reaction and special operations forces would be to undertake strikes against al Qaeda in Iraq.

It is clear that the Iraqi government will need assistance from the United States for some time to come, especially in carrying out security responsibilities. Yet the United States must make it clear to the Iraqi government that the United States could carry out its plans, including planned redeployments, even if the Iraqi government did not implement their planned changes. The United States must not make an open-ended commitment to keep large numbers of American troops deployed in Iraq.

As redeployment proceeds, military leaders should emphasize training and education of forces that have returned to the United States in order to restore the force to full combat capability. As equipment returns to the United States, Congress should appropriate sufficient funds to restore the equipment over the next five years.

The United States should work closely with Iraq's leaders to support the achievement of specific objectives--or milestones--on national reconciliation, security and governance. Miracles cannot be expected, but the people of Iraq have the right to expect action and progress. The Iraqi government needs to show its own citizens--and citizens of the United States and other countries--that it deserves continued support.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in consultation with the United States, has put forward a set of milestones critical for Iraq. His list is a good start, but it must be expanded to include milestones that can strengthen the government and benefit the Iraqi people. President Bush and his national security team should remain in close and frequent contact with the Iraqi leadership to convey a

clear message: there must be prompt action by the Iraqi government to make substantial progress toward the achievement of these milestones.

If the Iraqi government demonstrates political will and

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makes substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and governance, the United States should make clear its willingness to continue training, assistance, and support for Iraq's security forces and to continue political, military, and economic support. If the Iraqi government

does not make substantial progress toward the achievement of milestones on national reconciliation, security, and governance, the United States should reduce its political, military, or economic support for the Iraqi government.

Our report makes recommendations in several other areas. They include improvements to the Iraqi criminal justice system, the Iraqi oil sector, the U.S. reconstruction efforts in Iraq, the U.S. budget process, the training of U.S. government personnel, and U.S. intelligence capabilities.

#### Conclusion

It is the unanimous view of the Iraq Study Group that these recommendations offer a new way forward for the United States in Iraq and the region. They are comprehensive and need to be implemented in a coordinated fashion. They should not be separated or carried out in isolation. The dynamics of the region are as important to Iraq as events within Iraq.

The challenges are daunting. There will be difficult days ahead. But by pursuing this new way forward, Iraq, the region, and the United States of America can emerge stronger.

END TEXT

¶6. Minimize considered.

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